

2016 Question 3—OPEN QUESTION TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

In introducing students to Question 3, help them understand the typical format of the question. They should notice the background information, the task description, and the list of suggested works. It is a good idea to tell students to ignore or even to cross out the suggested list of works that appears beneath the prompt. Students often waste time worrying about books/plays that they haven't read or are distracted by books/plays that they want to read. The list is meant to be helpful, but it is not required that the students know or use any of works on the list. Students need to be encouraged to use works that they have studied in class, know well, and can write about with insight.

Prior to the exam, you will want to discuss why the prompt requires works of literary merit. Works written for entertainment or for mass appeal can be superficial in scope, while works of literary merit afford students the opportunity to demonstrate their critical thinking and college level writing skills. They may waste time trying to prove a work has merit rather than devoting the time wisely toward crafting the essay.

For teachers, the Student Performance Q & A on AP Central is a helpful resource for information on each of the particular essays. The comments are from the Chief Reader.

https://securemedia.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/ap/ap16_english_lit_student_performance_qa.pdf

Classroom Suggestions for Preparing to Write to the Question 3 Prompt:

1. Students need to read the prompt carefully and must realize they must address all aspects of the prompt. The prompt will have at least two tasks – concrete and abstract. Students will always have to discuss the meaning of the work as a whole (theme) for one of the tasks.
2. It is helpful to have the students rephrase the tasks in the form of questions. One example might be, “What does cruelty reveal about the victim in the story?” In the essays, students need to do more than merely summarize plot or ramble on in vague and unsupported generalities. Key words from the scoring rubric for an 8-9 essay include phrases such as *well-focused, persuasive, deeper understanding of the meaning of the work as a whole, apt and specific textual support, significant insight and understanding.*
3. Students should choose a novel or play that they know very well and have studied in class. After reading the prompt, they should make notes and an outline for at least 2 works that they know would work well. The suggested time for each essay is 40 minutes; at least 8-10 minutes can be spent choosing a work and outlining a response.
4. Students do need to use specific references to the narrative elements of the work, but they are not required to use direct quotations. Lower-half essays often are flawed by factual



errors in basic narrative information, such as character names, settings, events, and symbols.

5. Though AP readers are not expecting the “canned” five-paragraph essay, the essay must be well organized. The introduction should be short, with 2-3 sentences, including a clearly articulated thesis statement; 2-3 fully developed body paragraphs that include specific references to the text and analysis connecting plot to abstract ideas; and a 1-2 sentence conclusion that connects to the universal idea(s) in the work.
6. Above all, students must learn to budget their time on the three essays, using about 40 minutes per essay. They will have 120 minutes to write all three free response essays, and no one will make them move on to the next essay at the end of 40 minutes. These three essays are averaged together for 55% of the overall score; it does not help students to do exceptionally well on one essay and poorly on another because they were rushed for time. Students can work on the essays in any order. Starting with Question 3 is a good choice for many since they must rely on their memory of the novel or play’s content. Once they have written that essay, they are then free to move on to the poetry and prose analyses in which the text is provided. In addition, for students who have prepared well for Question 3, the completion of the essay may take less than 40 minutes which leaves them more time for the other two questions.

Deconstruction Activities

PROMPT—The Open Question/Question 3: Many works of literature contain a character who intentionally deceives others. The character’s dishonesty may be intended either to help or to hurt. Such a character, for example, may choose to mislead others for personal safety, to spare someone’s feelings, or to carry out a crime. Choose a novel or play in which a character deceives others. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze the motives for that character’s deception and discuss how the deception contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

What do you have to know and be able to write about to fully address this prompt? Encourage students to deconstruct the tasks of this particular prompt. You might consider listing or projecting their ideas on the board to underscore the need to know all the parts of the prompt.

Here are some ideas:

- The understanding of “deception” and “dishonesty” and ways in which such behaviors are recognized in both real life and fiction
- Possible motives for deception and dishonesty
- A thorough recall of characters, setting, plot events, and theme of a novel or play
- An identification of an appropriate character who intentionally misleads others within the plot of the novel or play
- The nature of the deception and/or dishonesty
- The motivations of the character who acts in a deceptive or dishonest way
- The characteristics and/or responses of others in the novel or play to the character’s acts



- The meaning of the work, or the theme of the work
- _____
- _____

Once students have thoroughly analyzed the prompt, ask them to brainstorm ways in which deception and dishonesty take form. Allow for a short discussion of various meanings and occasions in which the words might be appropriately used. Here are dictionary definitions for both words:

Deception: *an act that willfully or knowingly misleads or falsely persuades others* (merriam-wester.com)

Dishonesty: *a disposition to lie, cheat, or steal; fraud* (merriam-wester.com)

Ask students to pay particular attention to the words “willfully” or “knowingly” in the first definition. Then ask them to consider the following questions: How is *deception* different from *dishonesty*? Are these two words synonyms of one another or do they imply different kinds of behavior? Ask students to brainstorm examples from their own lives, from the lives of their friends, or from current events that illustrate the varied meanings of each of these words. Consider listing these examples on the board or screen.

For each example students provide for “deception,” ask them to answer these questions as they apply to one selected novel or play:

- Which character deceives others?
- What form does the deception take? What is the context for the action?
- How does the author present the act of deception? Does the author remain neutral or does he/she seem to offer judgment of the action?
- What are the character’s motivations for the deceptive action? Are these motivations understandable?
- What other personality traits of the chosen character might make the deception surprising? Ironic? Expected?
- What are the consequences for the chosen character, once he/she commits the deception?
- What are the consequences for other characters?
- How might the deception perpetrated by the chosen character reveal the author’s main idea or theme?

AP Readers for the Open Question in 2016 discovered that, while most students understood the meaning of deceptive and dishonest actions, many students focused more on effects and consequences of the action and overlooked an analysis of the motivations for such actions. Many of the lower-scoring essays oversimplified the idea of deception by combining it with ideas such as revenge, cruelty, and greed. Upper-half essays, as always, focused on appropriate details from the novel or play and analyzed in a more insightful way the connections between deception and the “big idea” of the work. Some of the best essays discussed ways in which a character, in attempting to deceive others, really practices a self-deception in the most telling way.



This next activity asks students to brainstorm examples and come to a clear understanding of a character’s intentional deception of others.

Choose a novel or play that includes an act or acts of deception that are important to the theme of the work.
 Title and author of work: _____
 Briefly describe the act(s) of deception:

How does the deception depicted in this literary work relate to one of the themes in the work?

Who is the character who deceives others? What is the actual deception?	What are the motivations behind these intentional deceptive acts?	Who is affected by the deception? What are the ultimate consequences for everyone?
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Introductory Paragraphs—High-scoring essays for the Open Question (Question 3) generally have introductions of just one to three well-developed sentences. Lengthy introductions are ineffective for this essay. Regardless of how long the introduction is, however, it must **answer** the questions of the prompt, not merely restate the prompt. Examine the following introductions from two high-scoring essays and identify what the student writer has done well in the introduction. Notice that these introductory paragraphs not only identify a deceptive action but also imply a thematic idea revealed through that deception.



from *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* Dimmesdale's dishonesty towards his religious followers and his town is primarily utilized to develop the themes of the work. Dimmesdale's deception of his religious followers is used by Hawthorne in order to reinforce his attitude towards religion and its contradictions as well as his motif of sin and redemption.

from *Othello* by William Shakespeare

In William Shakespeare's play *Othello*, the character Iago deceives Othello into believing that his wife has betrayed him by having sex with another man. Through this deception Shakespeare is able to reveal that mankind is driven with a powerful desire for revenge and that man has a dangerous tendency to believe the worst about those closest to him.

Now ask students to write an introductory paragraph of two to three sentences for each of the works they identified in the chart above. Remind them that in their introductory paragraphs they should answer—not just repeat—the questions of the prompt.

Introductory Paragraph #1 Title of work:	Introductory Paragraph #2 Title of work:



Supporting Evidence for Body Paragraphs—Using the introductions they now have written, ask students to list specific details in the novel or play that illustrate and support their introductions.

Novel or Play #1	Novel or Play #2

Body Paragraphs—The body paragraphs of the essay must contain more than mere plot summary. A good rule for students to remember is always to include a reference to the abstract idea and the meaning of the work as a whole after describing or retelling each specific detail of the plot. **So if they build a body paragraph around one detail of the work, they must make sure they draw a strong connection to the abstract idea after retelling or describing the detail.**

Student Samples—Consider reading the following sample body paragraphs aloud to help students discover the distinction between **plot summary (evidence)** and **analysis**. Remind students that analysis or commentary ties the plot details to the abstract idea(s) and the theme of the work. Encourage them to highlight words of **evidence** in one color and words of **analysis** in another.



From *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Dimmesdale's role as a prominent religious leader in his Puritan society is significant when analyzing the aftermath of his affair with Hester Prynne. Although Hester is punished for her crime in the form of social humiliation and alienation, Dimmesdale never reveals himself to be her accomplice in their sin of adultery. Dimmesdale's motive for his dishonesty stems from his unrealistic expectations as a religious role model. He becomes worried that no one will trust him to purify their soul since his isn't perfect. In addition Dimmesdale's hubris clouds his judgment as his honesty will ruin his spotless reputation. Therefore, instead of revealing his ignominy to his town, Dimmesdale seems to redeem himself by performing good works for others. However, Dimmesdale finds his mind and body deteriorating as he becomes guilt ridden. In other words, the longer Dimmesdale keeps a secret from society, the worse his internal torment gets. This notion is persistently developed as Dimmesdale continues to disappoint Pearl, his daughter that he won't claim, and allow Hester to socially bear both his and her punishment for their sins. Additionally his extreme feelings of guilt and dishonor do not fade even when he plans to escape his town with Hester and Pearl. Dimmesdale's failure to redeem himself is evident when he eventually dies on account of his overwhelming spiritual and physical destruction.

From *Othello* by William Shakespeare

Iago decides to plot and deceive his general after believing he was slighted by Othello for having not received a promotion. Iago's motivation is revenge, a powerful emotion that he understands fully. He appreciates the influence of revenge which is why his deception revolves around Othello feeling that his wife has wronged him and thus that he must extract some punishment from her. Othello plays directly into this trick, and thus with the same motive of revenge as Iago, kills his wife. In having both characters act cruelly out of a desire for revenge, Shakespeare is able to expose the oppressive power of revenge as it can come to dominate an individual's life and lead him to commit horrible crimes against those people they love most. Additionally, by having Iago's reason for causing the death of Desdemona, suicide of Othello, and murder of Iago's own wife be something as petty as a promotion, Shakespeare reveals that revenge can spring from seemingly insignificant events yet have devastating results on others. Othello falling for this revenge laden deception also demonstrates the blinding impact of revenge, as the desire to avenge oneself often becomes so overwhelming that they can become blind to the truth, reason, or love. Just as Othello was.



After discussing these sample paragraphs with your students, ask them to retrieve their own Question 3 essay from the mock exam. They should choose their best or strongest body paragraph and highlight plot summary or **evidence** in one color and **analysis** or commentary in another. Using the space provided on the student activity, they can rewrite the paragraph, incorporating ideas they have learned through these exercises. You may find it helpful to allow students to work in small editing groups to support one another's efforts.

What does an upper-half essay look like?

The essay below is an example of an upper-half essay written for the 2016 AP English Literature Exam. Consider reading this essay aloud with your students and having them highlight passages that exemplify the descriptors of an upper-half essay: *well-focused, persuasive, deeper understanding of the meaning of the work as a whole, apt and specific textual support, significant insight and understanding*. This essay is included in the student handout with space in the margin for students to make notes about the particular descriptors they observe. A few examples have been provided for you.

*insight and
understanding*

Deception is a major focal theme of Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man*. The novel traces the journey of a nameless narrator as he overcomes a blindness to the deceptive reality of his world and is able to finally clearly see the true motives of those who are around him. The theme of deception in the novel serves as an obstacle the narrator faces before he is able to complete his journey of seeking clarity and self-discovery.

*deceptive act and the
motivations for it*

Throughout the novel the narrator is betrayed by many of the characters whom he looked up to and trusted. The first betrayal was that of his college professor Dr. Bledsoe. A firm believer of education and peaceful social reform, the narrator admired Dr. Bledsoe and his contributions to colored college education in the south. When he discovers that Dr. Bledsoe's sub motive as president of the university is to gain power and the lengths that he would go to retain it, the narrator is disgusted. Not only does he realize that he had wrongly been led to believe that Dr. Bledsoe truly cared about colored education, he also realized his own vulnerability to deception. It is here that he also acknowledges that he would need to find a new community and new effort for him to continue fighting for his beliefs, thus starting the narrator's journey to find himself and the place where he belonged.

consequences

*apt and specific
textual support*

When Brother Jack approaches the narrator after a riot in Harlem a short couple of days after the narrator had traveled to the North, the narrator was reasonably dubious. But driven by a need for financial independence and an outlet to serve a purpose to the community, the narrator becomes convinced that the Brotherhood was where he belonged. He admires and aspires to be like his mentors and earnestly looks forward to the day where he can create change in the African American community with his own speeches. This notion, however, is quickly realized to be too good to be true. Whereas



Brother Jack originally brought the narrator in under the pretense of a speaking, the reality was that his sole purpose was to relay the brotherhood's scripted ideas to manipulate the community for their personal motives. The narrator was prohibited from creating speeches that could have a potentially dangerous effect. Instead he could only communicate with the audiences under the brotherhood's close watch and scrutiny. He realizes that he was only one chess piece played by the Brotherhood who was absorbed in a game of their own, one that he didn't wish to be a part of. The game had major consequences and with regret he realizes them as a result of mistakes of his own.

Towards the end of the novel, the narrator, hoping to find an escape from the chaos of reality, puts on a pair of sunglasses as a disguise. Curiously, the people of Harlem mistake the narrator as Rinehart, a legal pimp. Through the sunglasses he learns about the complex character of Reinhart and is also able to make the realization that he was used as a tool in the Brotherhood Revolution. Through this he realizes what he really wants is the common societal growth to be equal between and irrelevant to the black-and-white of skin. He is firm in his belief that he does not want to be in the control of others any longer but rather to make progress for racial equality by means of his own. Though he is deceiving others of his identity under the sunglasses, he is finally able to clearly see himself.

Though there are more betrayals and deceptions in the novel, like that of Dr. Norton or Young Emerson, that of Bledsoe and the Brotherhood, as well as that of his own serve as the marking points for the three stages of the narrator's journey to self-discovery.

